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CONTRASTIVE CULTURAL FEATURES IN FL TEACHING.

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CONTRASTIVE CULTURAL FEATURES SHOULD BE INCLUDED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE GRAMMATICAL LESSON AS A MEANS OF COUNTERBALANCING THE GENERALLY UNSATISFACTORY MATERIAL USED FOR RUSSIAN TEXTS. LESSONS FOR AMERICAN STUDENTS LEARNING RUSSIAN SHOULD INCLUDE PHONOLOGICAL DRILLS ON VOWEL LENGTHS, DISTRIBUTION OF VOICED OBSTRUENTS, AND OBSTRUENT CLUSTERS, WHEREAS RUSSIAN STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH SHOULD BE MADE AWARE OF THEIR TENDENCY TOWARD SHORTENING VOWELS AND TERMINAL UNVOICING. THE INCLUSION OF CULTURAL FEATURES IN GRAMMATICAL LESSONS CAN BE EXTENDED AND REINFORCED BY TESTING THE CULTURAL CONTRASTS SEPARATELY OR BY COMBINED TESTING ON CULTURAL CONTRASTS AND GRAMMATICAL AND PHONOLOGICAL POINTS. TWO SAMPLE LESSONS AND TESTS, IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN, ARE INCLUDED. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "THE SLAVIC AND EAST EUROPEAN JOURNAL," VOLUME 11, NUMBER 3, FALL 1967, PAGES 302-307. (SS)

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# Contrastive Cultural Features in FL Teaching

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OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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This article deals with the pedagogical application of contrastive cultural features, presented within the framework of an experimental lesson in Russian and English. Cultural slots will be given first as part of a lesson of Russian for English speakers, then for a lesson of English for Russian speakers. Some phonological problems will be touched on, and the contrast of phonemic versus non-phonemic features, depending on the language taught, will be emphasized. A few examples of overall testing will be given in order to demonstrate that the cultural component can be tested like any aspect of language, and that its testing can be combined with the testing of phonology and grammar.

The introduction of cultural slots is a logical extension of contrastive phonological and grammatical analyses. We believe that cultural aspects can be formalized and should be given a proper place in our foreign language teaching.

In the experimental lessons, drills will be based on a single situation, described in a paragraph. Cultural slots will be provided when needed, and the paragraph will be examined for contrastive phonological and grammatical features. The activities portrayed in the lessons revolve around a small group of college students; lessons for elementary or high school children would, of course, have to be adapted to their level.

The sample Russian lesson given below presupposes at least one semester of instruction, with some background in the Russian sound system, basic grammatical patterns, and spelling. (The formal *vy* is used throughout, even though in some situations *ty* might be more appropriate.)

**Встреча на улице**

**Чтение**

**Два друга встречаются на Невском проспекте, главной улице Ленинграда, где часто гуляют молодые люди. Маша спрашивает Колю, куда он идет завтра вечером, и Коля ей отвечает, что он идет в Мариинский театр на "Лебединое озеро." Плисецкая танцует. Маша говорит Коле, что она хочет пойти в Большую консерваторию на оперу "Евгений Онегин" или "Пиковая дама." Саша подходит и говорит, что у него есть три**

билета на балет "Каменный цветок," и они решают пойти все вместе на это представление.

Дополнение

"Лебединое озеро"—классический балет. "Каменный цветок"—современный балет. "Пиковая дама" и "Евгений Онегин"—оперы. Проспект—широкая улица. Плисецкая —знаменитая балерина. Коля и Маша—студенты. У них нет машин. Молодые люди часто ходят в кино и в театры. Молодые люди часто гуляют. Когда у них есть деньги, они идут в кондитерскую.

Диалог

—Добрый вечер, Коля!
—А . . . Маша, как дела?
—Хорошо . . . Что вы делаете?
—Ничего особенного; гуляю.
—А куда идете завтра вечером?
—Наверно в Мариинский театр.
—Что в программе?
—"Лебединое озеро." Плисецкая танцует.
—О, да, она чудная . . .
—А куда вы идете?
—Хочу пойти в Большую консерваторию.
—Что там дается?
—"Евгений Онегин" или "Пиковая дама."
—А вот Саша. А что вы скажете?
—Пойдем посмотрим "Каменный цветок."
—А у вас есть билеты?
—Да, у меня три билета. Пойдем?
—Хорошо, пойдем все вместе.

Вопросы и ответы

Кто встречается на улице?
Три студента: Коля, Маша и Саша.
Где они встречаются?
На Невском проспекте.
Молодые люди гуляют часто?
Да, очень часто.
Куда Коля идет завтра вечером?
В Мариинский театр.
Кто танцует?
Плисецкая.
"Лебединое озеро"—классический балет?
Да, классический.
"Каменный цветок"—тоже?
Нет, это балет современный.
Вам нравится "Евгений Онегин"?
Да, это хорошая опера. А вам нравится?
Я предпочитаю "Пиковую даму."
У студентов есть машины?
Нет, у них нет машин.

| В СССР | В США |
|---|---|
| Молодые люди поступают в университеты в 16–17 лет, после окончания десятилетки. | В 18–19 лет, после 12 лет школы. |
| У студентов нет автомобилей и у них мало карманных денег. | Многие имеют автомобили и карманные деньги. |
| Молодые люди начинают ухаживать в 16–17 лет. Пары едут за город, идут в театры и парки. | В 13–15 лет. Пары идут в кино, на вечеринки, и катаются на автомобилях. |
| Молодые люди интересуются образованием больше, чем браком, т. к. женщины тоже должны работать. | Интересуются браком больше, чем образованием (особенно девушки). |
| У молодых людей нет ни жилищного комфорта, ни аппаратов телевидения. Общественная жизнь сосредоточена вокруг дворцов культуры и улиц. | Жизнь сосредоточена вокруг дома, парков и кондитерских "в моде." |
| Опера и балет популярны среди молодежи. Они часто получают билеты через различные организации. | Считается дорогим развлечением. Не для молодых людей. |

Lessons should further comprise phonological (and grammatical) drills, for example:

(a) There is no vowel length in Russian except in emphatic speech and song; the tendency of Americans to lengthen some vowels (especially before voiced obstruents and under stress) will give the impression of surprise, excitement, or doubt: Not *lebed*[í:]*noe ozero* but *lebed*[í]*noe ozero*; not *M*[á:]*ša, S*[á:]*ša* but *M*[á]*ša, S*[á]*ša*; not [ku:dá], [tu:dá] but [kudá], [tudá].

(b) The distribution of voiced obstruents is limited, and the opposition of voicing is neutralized in terminal position where only voiceless obstruents occur (contrary to spelling): *dru*[k] 'friend' (spelled with a *g*), *ru*[k] 'of hands' (spelled with *k*), *goro*[t] 'city' (spelled with *d*) and *voro*[t] 'collar' (spelled with *t*).

(c) In obstruent clusters regressive assimilation in voicing is often obscured by the spelling: [spor] 'quarrel' (spelled with *s*), [vózglas] 'cry' (with *z*), [vosk] 'wax' (with *s*), as against [zbor] 'congregation' (with *s*).

A comparable lesson in American English (and culture) follows:

**Friends meet in a restaurant**

**Reading**

**Two old friends meet in "Tehaan's," a Georgetown restaurant in Washington, D.C., where college students often have their meals. Mary wants to know where John is**

going tomorrow night, and John tells her that he is going to Water Gate, to hear the Marine Band. Mary tells him that she is going to the Hains Point to see the cherry blossoms. Jack comes along and tells them that he has a blind date to go to a baseball game at Griffith Stadium. He invites them to stop by and see his new convertible.

Supplement

Georgetown is the oldest part of Washington. Georgetown University was founded in 1879. Hains Point is a drive on the Potomac. Cherry trees were given to America by Japan. Every spring a Cherry Queen is selected. Military bands play at the Water Gate every summer. Basketball and football are popular American sports. The New York Yankees is a famous baseball team. Many college students have cars.

[Questions and dialogue omitted for reasons of space.]

| In the USA | In the USSR |
|---|---|
| University programs are very flexible; a variety of courses is offered to students; they can take either day or night classes. | The program is standard throughout the country. |
| Many students work through college. | Very few work while studying. |
| After graduation, students usually choose their own jobs. | In most cases, people go to state-provided, compulsory jobs. |
| Sports are very popular and are not state-supported. | All sports are state-supported. |
| Social activities are held on an informal level except for special occasions. | People dress more formally except for picnics. |
| Blind dates are popular in the USA, especially among students. | Not very common in the USSR. |
| Students often eat in small neighborhood restaurants. Although they talk about a diet, they seldom follow it. | Students eat at the university cafeteria, where food is often marked in calories. |

Some examples of phonological drills for Russian students learning English are:

(a) As noted above, an American learning Russian may have a tendency to lengthen vowels in certain positions; this distortion, however unpleasant, is, of course, not phonemic, i.e., does not alter the meaning. If, however, a Russian student transfers Russian vowels into English, a number of crucial contrasts tend to be neutralized, e.g., the tense vs. lax contrast in /i/ vs. /i:/, /u/ vs. /u:/, etc., contrasts in height (/e/ vs. /æ/), and so on. Even when recognition has been mastered, production may lag behind. Various remedial techniques can be used, such as a multiple choice rhyming technique, where the student is required to select correct rhymes: for the vowel /i:/ as in *leave* he may be requested to choose between *live, weave,* and *Eve*; for /e:/ as in *mane*—between *vain, vein,* and *man*; etc.

(b) In Russian, the contrast of voiced vs. voiceless obstruents is neutralized in terminal position, where only voiceless obstruents may occur. Pronouncing voiced obstruents as spelled will mark the speaker as a

foreigner, but should not give rise to major phonological misinterpretations. In English, of course, such neutralization is not admissible; cf. pairs like *back* and *bag, buzz* and *bus, bat* and *bad*. Special drills will be needed to overcome a Russian student's tendency toward terminal unvoicing. Here again, production will be more difficult than recognition, and drills like the omitted letters technique can be used to good advantage: Foo__ is very tasty in this restaurant [d] or [t]; They are going to mo__ the palace (attack) [b] or [p].

It can readily be seen that the contrastive mode of presentation can be easily extended to include cultural features. The contrastive mode of presentation can be further reinforced by contrastive testing, as illustrated by the sample tests below, all for learners of English. The first of these is meant to test culture only:

Mark each item with a (1) for USA or a (2) for USSR:
( ) F. works at night and studies in the morning.
( ) Y. is going to the opera.
( ) D. is going to see the cherry blossoms.
( ) O. walks every night on the main avenue.
( ) I. is watching his favorite TV program.
( ) Z. has three tickets to the Culture Palace.
( ) W. did not get her allowance last week.
( ) P. cannot marry; she didn't finish college.
( ) T. started to date at 13.
( ) G. does not like the job, but he has to take it.
( ) N. is studying at Catholic University.
( ) X. is going to a baseball game.
( ) S. will wear jeans to the party.
( ) B. cannot work and study; it is against the rule.
( ) H. has a convertible.
( ) M. was the Cherry Queen last year.
( ) N. goes to the ballet every Friday.
( ) K. likes her blind date.
( ) A. is only 17, but he goes to college.

The remaining tests combine testing on cultural contrasts with testing on phonological and grammatical points.

(1) USA
(2) USSR

Check all sentences: 1 or 2.
Select the correct letter or word to insert.

Phonology—vowel length.
( ) D. is going to s[ ] the cherry blossoms. [i:, i]
( ) S. will wear j[ ]ns to the party. [i:, i]
( ) M. was Cherry Qu[ ]n last year. [i:, i]
( ) B. cannot work and study; it is against the r[ ]le. [u:, u]
( ) T. started to d[ ]te at 13. [e:, e]
( ) G. does not like the j[ ]b, but he has to take it. [a:, a]
( ) O. w[ ]lks every night on the main avenue. [ɔ:, ɔ]

Phonology—neutralization.
( ) I. i[ ] watching hi[ ] favorite TV program. [z, s]
( ) M. wa[ ] the Cherry Queen last year. [z, s]
( ) N. goe[ ] to the ballet every Friday. [z, s]
( ) W. di[ ] not get her allowance last week. [d, t]
( ) P. cannot marry; she didn't finish colle[ ]e. [š, č]
( ) G. does not like the jo[ ], but he has to take it. [b, p]

Grammar—verb forms.
( ) Y. ( ) going to the opera. am, is, are
( ) N. and M. ( ) going to the ballet. am, is, are
( ) F. ( ) at night and studies in the morning. work, works
( ) K. ( ) her blind date. like, likes
( ) O. and P. ( ) every night on the main avenue. walk, walks
( ) G. ( ) not like the job, but he has to take it. do, does
( ) H. ( ) a convertible. has, have

Grammar—articles.
( ) O. walks every night on ( ) main avenue. zero, *a, an, the*
( ) Z. has three tickets to ( ) Culture Palace. zero, *a, an, the*
( ) N. is studying at ( ) Catholic University. zero, *a, an, the*
( ) W. didn't get her allowance ( ) last week. zero, *a, an, the*

The above lessons and tests are, of course, merely illustrative, and both the content and the form of presentation can be altered to suit the needs and preferences of individual instructors; nevertheless, we hope to have demonstrated the desirability and feasibility of introducing formally contrasted cultural features along with contrastive phonology and grammar.

## NOTE

This article is offered as a modest corrective to the generally bad situation in the field of Russian textbooks.

The difficulties with textbooks published in the USSR are well known. Even though one may encounter in them varying degrees of cultural and linguistic authenticity, one still has to put up with the artificial glory of Stakhanovites, with tractors, five-year plans, and so on. They tend to go out of print quickly, and may encounter local censorship (Brookmount Elementary School [Montgomery Co., Md.], for example, permitted the use of a juvenile book printed in the USSR only after its cover had been removed).

Books published in the US, on the other hand, tend to be hastily written, either by native speakers without linguistic training, or by linguists not fully oriented in Russian language and culture. All too often, elements from cultures other than the contemporary Soviet one are included: the culture of pre-Revolutionary Russia, complete with *bliny*, samovars, and Russian fatalism; American or even French culture. For example, Marianna Poltoratzky and M. Zarechnak include in their «Русский язык» (2 vols.; Milwaukee, 1960) such unauthentic scenes as that of a barber and his wife scolding children for a broken window—in the USSR the barber's wife would be nowhere around her husband, who works in a large state barbershop. Significantly, the illustrations for *Russkij jazyk* are identical to those found in Léon Dostert, *Français* (Milwaukee, 1961).